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VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN SCHOOL AND OCCUPATION

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Vocational guidance deals with the problems of informing or advising persons in regard to choosing, preparing for, entering upon and making progress in occupations. The importance of this problem is evident to any thinking adult; what is not so obvious is the practical answer to the question: What can the school do about vocational guidance? This paper aims to present in summary fashion the plans and possibilities which suggest the answer. The very breadth of our problem makes its complexity inevitable. Glance, if you will, at the topics of the papers in this volume, and note that many of them are related, directly or indirectly, to success and happiness in the calling. Besides these subjects, moreover, vocational guidance must concern itself with the problems of commerce and industry: economics, labor organizations, land values, taxation, transportation; any plan for comprehensive guidance must not restrict itself to narrowly educational investigations.

In spite of the importance of the subject of vocational guidance, and the need for strenuous intellectual endeavor in attempting to solve its complex problems, schools had made little conscious effort to work out even a tentative solution until Meyer Bloomfield began his activities in the Boston schools six years ago. Several causes have contributed to the reluctance of the school: (a) School people have not known the occupational world well enough to advise pupils in regard to vocational opportunities; (b) schools "prepared for life" only in general and indefinite ways,—it was not widely recognized, as it begins to be now, that culture on the one hand and specific experiences of a practical sort on the other belong together and should both be furnished by the school; (c) it was frequently assumed that parents would provide all the vocational guidance necessary, or that the job itself would automatically furnish it; (d) American individualism led to a *laissez-faire* policy, to an enervating admiration of the "self-made" man, and to other such tacit denials of the utility of vocational guidance.

All this time in which the schools were neglecting the duty of coöperating with the young people when they were making their vocational decisions, however, an active but erroneous form of guidance was going on—a species of false guidance which still flourishes. The suggestions of the street, village, city, or limited environment enter the mind of the child and influence his decisions. Uncriticised information about the successes of others, suggestions of relatives or of child companions, or newspaper and magazine advertisements of doubtful veracity aid him in reaching decisions which determine the course of his whole life. If the school is not willing that such sources of vocational misinformation should monopolize the field, it must make systematic efforts to furnish proper substitutes.

WHAT THE SCHOOLS ARE DOING

Schools in various parts of the country have already developed the elements of effective vocational guidance. If certain good plans now in successful operation could be gathered up and set into motion in any one school system, that school system would make adequate provision for guidance. Let us now examine some of these plans.

(1) THE LIFE-CAREER CLASS FORMED

Some ten or more high schools, within the writer's limited investigation, are conducting regular classes for the study of occupations. The following are some illustrations of the work being done at various places: In Oakland Technical High School, California, first-year pupils meet in classes once each week throughout the year, and, under the leadership of teachers who are making a study of vocational guidance, investigate occupations and study the problems of continued education in relation to the calling. Boys and girls are in separate classes. In Middletown, Connecticut, the life-career class has been a regular part of the high school work for several years. Recently a textbook for boys has been issued, based on the work in this school.¹ The plan includes a study of the whole field of occupations, under ten different heads, together with discussions of the following topics: the importance of vocational information, characteristics of a good vocation, how to study voca-

¹ Gowin, Enoch Burton, and Wheatley, William Alonzo, *Occupations*, Ginn and Company, 1916.

tions, choosing a vocation, securing a position, efficient work and its reward.

Other plans are fully as comprehensive. Grand Rapids has accomplished the same result without creating new classes,—the work in English composition has been directed into vocational channels, and the pupils in all the grades from the seventh through the high school have the benefit of systematic enlightenment about the following topics: vocational ambition, value of education, the elements of character that make for success in life, vocational biographies, the world's work, choosing a vocation, preparation for life's work, vocational ethics, social ethics, civic ethics.²

The life-career class should begin much lower than the high school; it is known that a large proportion of the "leakage" from school occurs before the sixth grade. It is unfair to these children that they should be permitted to go from school into occupational life without some insight into and outlook upon the opportunities and problems about them.

(2) SCHOOL STUDIES ADAPTED TO VOCATIONAL NEEDS

Many schools which have not organized life-career classes have done excellent work in reorganizing the material in the subjects of the established program. The teacher of a lesson in arithmetic, geography, language, or science should bear in mind that each child's life presents certain actual and potential requirements of a personal, social, occupational, and civic sort, and should see that the study and experience involved in each lesson are so planned as to contribute something toward satisfying these needs. Many subjects of the school program should be almost wholly related to occupational needs, and practically every lesson in the school work has something to contribute to success and usefulness in the vocation. Occupational needs are not the only needs, but they should not be ignored. Teachers in Boston and Grand Rapids have made progress in this particular. Many teachers are using the "project" method in teaching: thus, arithmetical principles are taught in connection with "keeping store," or building a play house, and the principles of physics by putting together an automobile. Trips, visits to museums and galleries and coöperative tasks such as building a

² Davis, Jesse Buttrick, *Vocational and Moral Guidance*, Ginn and Company, 1914.

miniature landscape, dramatizing an event, or keeping the school yard clean, may be used as aids in teaching geography, history, and community civics. It has been said that lack of interest and profit in school work is largely due to the fact that the tasks assigned to children are those that no one outside of school is engaged in performing. Vocational guidance would be much more intelligently done if each child might have concrete experiences in solving actual problems.

(3) SCHOOL REORGANIZATION TO MEET VOCATIONAL NEEDS

A less direct but very important way in which the school system can adapt itself to the needs of vocational guidance is by changing its organization to suit modern needs. Kindergartens, good playground facilities, a school program rich in many different kinds of mental and manual exercises, and junior high schools with a wide range of subjects, all help the pupil to find his abilities and to measure himself against many kinds of tasks. Versatility is important; a "jack-of-all-trades" experience is a good basis for the intelligent choice of an occupation. Many school systems have in the elementary grades simple work in clay, printing, gardening, sewing, cooking, wood, and iron; and some have work in shoe repairing, electricity, cement, and bookbinding. The intermediate or junior high school, which admits children at the end of the sixth grade and keeps them for three years, offers splendid opportunity for the child's development and self-discovery. This is the "trying-out period"—the time when teachers and pupils may coöperate for vocational guidance with great advantage. All pupils at this age should have a broad study of occupational opportunities.

The organization should provide, too, for individual conferences on vocational choices, and on such questions as further education, means of preparation for particular occupations, opportunities of earning money to allow the education to be continued, and preferences of parents. These conferences need be nothing more than friendly conversations, with information and advice suited to the needs of the individual. Each child may be asked to choose several occupations for special study, with tentative decision on one or two. No pupil should be asked to make his final choice of an occupation prematurely,—many may profitably delay the choice until the college age. We may insist, however, that no one should be forced

by economic necessity, or by the negligence of the schools, to enter a job or an occupation blindly. In the Boston schools the eighth grade teachers hold individual conferences with their pupils, aiding them especially in choosing a high school. In Birmingham, England, men and women under the general direction of the school authorities in the occupations often act as advisers of children.

Teachers who are especially qualified for the work should have time allotted them for vocational guidance. Much can be done on a volunteer basis in the beginning, but the investigations necessary to effective work require more time than the teacher can spare from her regular duties. Those appointed to do counseling should study the economic, industrial, commercial and professional life of their communities, and make efforts to coöperate with workers and employers. They should follow the children who leave school, guiding them in their progress in the occupations, and deriving from them valuable information to use in advising those still in school. Counselors may hold frequent conferences for developing good methods in the work.

Parents, too, need help and advice. In Pomona, California, the vocational director for the schools is holding a series of parents' meetings for the consideration of problems connected with the guidance of the children. The school departments in a score or more of places have each appointed some one person to exercise general supervision over the vocational guidance work of the schools. These officers assist the teachers in finding occupational values in the studies of the school program, hold teachers' conferences for the discussion of methods of vocational guidance, enlist the aid of civic associations, help in securing work, arrange for apprenticeship and part-time agreements, investigate occupations, and conduct life-career classes.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR AIDS IN VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

The student affairs and club activities of the children give them experience which is valuable for vocational guidance. The Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girl movements acquaint their members with many kinds of useful activities not yet furnished by the schools, and they substitute projects or "merit badge" tests for formal instruction. Summer camps, athletics, debating, boys' and girls' clubs, student self-government, and literary societies all offer opportunities

for learning lessons of self-reliance, service, and coöperation—valuable traits for all callings of life.

Is finding jobs for children an aid to their vocational guidance? Some school people unhesitatingly answer yes, while others think that there are far more profitable activities for the vocational counselor. Though much good argument may be found for the affirmative side of the question, and though some "vocational guidance bureaus" are concerning themselves almost wholly with placement, it seems fair to say that other activities in vocational guidance are more profitable to society and to the individual than securing places for unprepared children who leave school. The conditions of finding employment are in an unsatisfactory state, but it is by no means certain that placement by school people would relieve these conditions, nor even that the school could obtain better positions for the masses of workers than they could secure for themselves. Placement deals with the effects of maladjustments in the occupational world, and the energy of the vocational counselor should be directed at removing the real causes of the difficulty.

THE RELATION OF VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Vocational education is the subject of another paper of this volume. Great strides forward have been taken during the last few years, and through this progress the efficiency of vocational guidance has been greatly increased. It is worth pointing out here, however, that vocational counseling requires certain essentials in the program of vocational education. In the first place, it is well to remember that vocational education must not begin too soon, even if it aims to help those already at work. Thus, it has been found that the pupils of the continuation schools (schools which young people at work attend during working hours for from four to ten hours per week) are most of them not ready for vocational education, for they have not really decided on a life-career and they are working at jobs which offer little opportunity for advancement. In the second place, vocational education must not be too narrowly restricted to training for the mere occupation. The reasons for this are that education for social, moral, and citizenship duties must receive ample attention; and that in spite of careful decision and careful preparation for an occupation a change in the choice of

vocation is sometimes made. Vocational training must be broader than training for one mechanical process; the younger the children the broader should the schooling be, even if specific training for the calling be left till after the young people have entered the occupation.

In the third place, vocational preparation should include a study of the economic, political, and social problems connected with industry and commerce. Many a farmer who has failed was efficient in everything but the problems of transportation and commission; the industrial worker should know something of wages, taxation, labor organizations, scientific management, unemployment, the factors in personal and social efficiency, blind alleys in industry, employment agencies, and welfare work.

COÖPERATION FOR GUIDANCE IN THE OCCUPATION

During the past few years the schools, the workers, and the employers have joined forces for investigations and improvement in a way never before thought possible. Vocational surveys, part-time schemes, continuation schools, extension and short courses, apprenticeship agreements, more practical methods of teaching, and new insight into working conditions, on the part of teachers, are some of the results. Let us note first the findings in regard to young workers.

(1) THE YOUNG WORKER

Investigations have shown that even in the states which do not tolerate the grosser forms of child labor, schools and occupations are to blame for the continuance of distressing conditions. It has been shown that in many instances the school fails to attract the child—he leaves because neither he nor his parents think that the schooling is worth while. Economic pressure seems to be less a controlling factor than it was formerly thought to be. Hence the duty of the school to satisfy the desire for “worth-while” education.

Again, it has been shown that the working child under sixteen is usually in a “blind-alley” occupation,—often a mere errand boy,—and finds himself several years later with no worthy calling and no preparation for any. Other disadvantages in children’s work are the necessity for their hunting work (this is especially to be regretted in the case of young girls), the seasonal character of much of the work for the young, the difficulties due to inefficiency and misunderstandings, and the wandering from job to job in the vain

hope that better conditions of employment will be found. Enlightened employers as well as educational investigators seem to have arrived at the conclusion that neither industry nor commerce needs the services of children under sixteen, and that their place is in the school.

Certain remedies have been proposed and tried; we have space here only to enumerate them: part-time work for those forced to earn money (either a half-day each in school and occupation, or alternate weeks); scholarships for needy children; better working agreements, these to be filed at the school offices; plans for opening "blind alleys"—for offering training to every young worker for promotion to a better occupation; progressive raising of the compulsory school age. It seems clear that vocational guidance cannot be effective without creating or at least working for better opportunities for boys and girls, hence the counselor is interested in furthering all movements for putting the school and work experiences of the young on a sounder basis.

(2) THE PROBLEMS OF EMPLOYMENT

The vocational counselor is interested, too, in coöperating with employers, the employed, and legislative and executive officials in the progressive improvement of conditions of labor. If the school is to prepare boys and girls for a life in industry and commerce, then it must be deeply interested in the question of wages, fatigue, hours of labor and steady employment. Some firms hire thousands annually, in order to keep a force of hundreds. They must be shown how to reduce this "labor turnover," and men interested in vocational guidance are assisting in the work. Employment departments are being put in charge of intelligent and responsible managers, and plans have been instituted for analyzing jobs, hiring help, transfers, promotions, handling of complaints and constructive suggestions, and training employment managers.

The modern movement for "scientific management" must be safeguarded in its service to society—the counselor must inform himself regarding this problem. The apparent conflict between personal ambition and community service must be solved through the aid of painstaking vocational guidance. School pupils must be trained for coöperative endeavor. Progressive business houses are making increasing effort to use the opinions of the employes in

determining the policies of management, and to turn over to them the social or welfare work of the establishments.

Both children and adults need guidance in seeking employment, and the counselor must join in the movement for public employment agencies and labor exchanges to take the place of the wasteful and unreliable commercial agency. Not only does the vocational guidance movement concern itself with these problems of employment; but it maintains also that the coming generation of workers should be equipped to contribute intelligently to their solution. The life-career classes, and the plans for vocational education, should include a discussion of these problems.

(3) DANGERS TO BE AVOIDED

Vocational guidance has not been free from certain misconceptions and questionable practices. The present utility of psychological testing for vocational guidance has been greatly exaggerated. In spite of extravagant claims, it is doubtful if any set of laboratory tests yet devised is of general, practical value for our purposes. Again, many sincere persons try to advise pupils by first classifying them into "types." Human nature is complex, however, and no simple pigeonholes will serve in vocational guidance. Besides, the theory that there are types of mind has been much discredited through recent investigations, and no counselor can afford to use it. Again, there has been in some schools an unwarranted use of record blanks with long lists of questions involving self-analysis beyond the abilities of the children. Teachers, too, have tried to analyze individual children, labeling one as "attentive," another "observant," another "dull," "persistent," "orderly," or "slow." It is now beginning to be seen that persons cannot be ticketed in this naive manner,—that the disorderly boy in one kind of activity is likely to become orderly in another, and that even a moral quality as honesty may, by the same person, be exhibited in one situation and be lacking in another. In other words, the theory of formal discipline or general training must not deceive the teachers; there are few if any mental qualities which, when present in one activity, may be credited to an individual as a general characteristic. A boy's perseverance in baseball does not guarantee his perseverance in arithmetic. Some teachers attach too great importance to mere physical characteristics, or to such vague and

unmeasured hypotheses as "the influence of heredity," "innate qualities," "native ability," and others. All reliance on such data, together with phrenology, "character analysis," and study of physiognomies, had best be left to the charlatan. Life is too complex for such short cuts,—scientific study of vocational guidance problems is necessary, and there is no easy way.

Again, overconfident advice must be avoided; it has been proved unsafe to attempt to tell a boy just what he can or cannot become. Then, too, unsocial influence has no place in vocational guidance. School people cannot afford to interest themselves in helping boys and girls merely to "get ahead of the other fellow," in the "race for success," nor to glorify mere will-power unchecked by social viewpoint, nor to encourage questionable forms of "salesmanship," as these propositions are advertised in some current magazines. Moral and social ideals must not be lost sight of. The student himself must by no means be passive in all this program of activity. He must progressively awaken to a realization of his opportunities, and must develop a desire to reap only the rewards of such honest service as he can fit himself to render. Without the student's awakening, vocational guidance is of little or no effect.

CONCLUSION

Such, in brief, are the main currents of interest and accomplishment in the movement for vocational guidance. Though the guidance is to be offered to each pupil in the schools, and to each young person at work, it will be seen that effective aid can be given only as schooling and conditions of employment are gradually improved. At the present time many school systems are making children aware of occupational opportunities, and preparing them for effective labor. There is taking place a reëxamination and readjustment of school methods (this volume is one of the evidences), and teachers are now as never before coöperating with intelligent laymen in the solution of perplexing problems of employment. The progress in these fields of educational and economic endeavor during the past decade gives hope enough for the future. The movement which we are discussing in this paper aims to contribute its best thought to these streams of conscious evolution, and, at the same time, to derive from them the means for a more efficient "vocational guidance of youth," in school and in occupation.